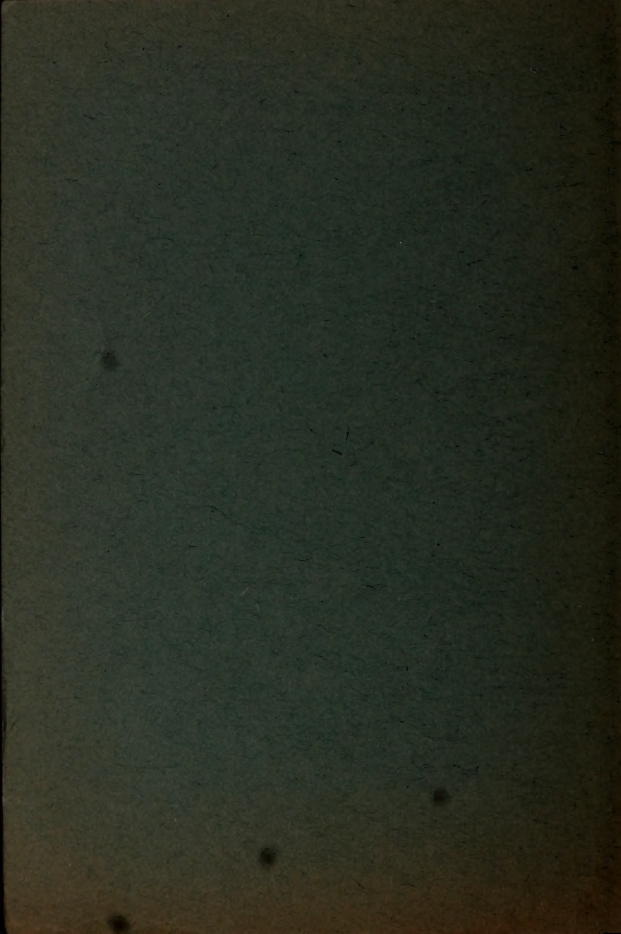


LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1020
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Why I Am an Infidel

Luther Burbank



LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1026
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Why I Am an Infidel

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LUTHER BURBANK

Luther Burbank, naturalist, originator of new fruits, flowers, etc., was born in Massachusetts in 1849. He was always devoted to nature study, especially plant life, with which he early began to experiment. He moved to Santa Rosa, California, in 1875, where he conducted Burbank's Experiment Farms. He often had several thousand distinct experiments under way—even at the time of his death growing some five thousand distinct botanical specimens from all over the world. He was also a special lecturer on evolution at Leland Stanford, Jr., University. His fame as a botanist and inventor of new plant forms awakened widespread interest in plant breeding throughout the world.

In January, 1926, Luther Burbank made a declaration of agnosticism to a newspaper reporter. Although Burbank's rationalistic convictions were not by any means unknown to readers of his books, or to his friends, the publication of this interview in the newspapers created a furore of criticism throughout the country. Since it then became known generally to the public at large, the facts about Luther Burbank's agnosticism were news. In spite of criticism from the pulpits, he refused to qualify his unequivocal statements. "I am an infidel," he said.

About the middle of March Luther Burbank became ill with gastro-intestinal complications. He died April 11, 1926. Lest the "last words" of this infidel be garbled in future ages to de-

lude credulous mankind, it should be emphatically stated that Luther Burbank did not recant—even the newspaper accounts of his death made this fact clear. He remained an infidel until the last—an unbeliever, scientifically sure of himself, passing from life into darkness.

WHY I AM AN INFIDEL

Science is knowledge arranged and classified according to truth, facts and the general laws of nature. Our Dr. David Starr Jordan defines it more briefly as "organized human knowledge" or "human experience tested and set in order."

There are always at least two sides of every question which may be suggested to the human mind. Sometimes both views are correct, but far more often one is right, and according to facts and truth, the other wrong. All personal, social, moral and national success depends upon the judicious wisdom of our choices made by the aid of science. Narrow personal prejudices and feelings quite too often becloud the issue and ultimate defeat is the inevitable result.

Life as we see it around us on this planet is usually thought to be confined to man, animals and plants, those organisms which grow and reproduce their kind with more or less precision. Why should we omit crystals which grow as truly as plants and reproduce themselves quite as precisely to type, or the more primitive forms of life which are reproduced by division? Science is proving that the world is not half dead, but that every atom is all life and motion.

Life is self-expression, intricate organized polarity. The lure of happiness and the fear of pain are fundamental qualities possessed by all living things and are the two forces which have through untold millenniums kept what

we usually call life from destruction by the ever encroaching outside forces of destruction. Life is heredity plus environment. At birth of a plant, animal or man, heredity has already been fixed. Environment may now call into action only those tendencies which have been experienced in the age long past, yet may recombine and intensify them in a most surprising way. Such a modification is limited, generally, to the individual, but may, if repeated generation after generation, by slow increments at last become fixed and available in the species.

Assimilation and reproduction are, and, of course, must be fundamental and universal. The power of adaptation to various conditions which beset all life may also be considered as fundamental for the continuation of any species. All these various powers of adaptation have to be acquired individually and repeated indefinitely until so fixed in the life stream that they are reproduced. *Repetition* is the means of impressing any quality or character in animal life or in man and by just the same means plants are impressed, and their qualities and habits changed as we desire. All life depends upon a series of selections and repetitions.

The first faint glimmerings of choice may be seen in the polarity of the magnet, next we see it perhaps in plants and the more primitive forms of life, and as we mount higher and higher in the scale of life there is more and more freedom of choice and less dependence upon heredity.

Ancient tribes and nations had many gods, often one for almost every phenomenon of nature. The Hebrews have the credit of inventing the conception of our monotheistic Jewish-Christian God, who however is represented as having most of the weaknesses and bad habits of primitive man; this was a step in the path of evolution toward man's present conception of God; the God within us is the only available God we know and the clear light of science teaches us that we must be our own saviors, if we are to be found worth saving; in other words, to depend upon the "kingdom within." The manhood and womanhood which would make the most of life in *service* to others is a sublimated form of the best of self which leads the way to a long lifetime of usefulness, happiness, health and peace.

There are without doubt some human beings in every nation, who, according to our present standards of civilization are truly civilized, but grave doubts may be entertained as to any community or any nation who could in any way measure up even to this standard scale of life, where we find more and more *freedom*, but even man today is far from free. Slaves yet to war, crime and ignorance—the only "unpardonable sin." Slaves to unnumbered ancient "taboos," superstitions, prejudices and fallacies, which one by one are slowly but surely weakening under the clear light of the morning of science; the savior of mankind. Science which has opened our eyes to the vastness of the universe and given us light, truth and freedom from fear where once was darkness, ignorance

and superstition. There is no personal salvation, there is no national salvation, except through science. There are too few who exploit the inexhaustible forces of nature and far too many who exploit their fellow beings. Useless waste and unnecessary parasitism take at least nine-tenths of the productive capacity of the United States.

Will the growing intelligence of man (Science) forever tolerate the wholesale production of the ever-increasing proportion of idiots, morons, Mongoloids, insane, criminal, weak, destitute, nervous, diseased half men and women who infest the earth to their own sorrow and disgrace and perhaps the ultimate destruction of our present state of civilization? A knowledge of the fundamental laws of nature, not inefficient palliatives, is the *first* step. Is there a problem equal to the building of a better humanity? Our lives as we live them are passed on to others, whether in physical or mental forms tinging all future lives forever. This should be enough for one who lives for truth and service to his fellow passengers on the way. No avenging Jewish God, no satanic Devil, no fiery hell is of any interest to him. The scientist is a lover of truth for the very love of truth itself, wherever it may lead. Every normal human being has ideals, one or many, to look up to, reach up to, to grow up to. Religion refers to the sentiments and feelings; science refers to the demonstrated everyday laws of Nature. Feelings are all right, if one does not get drunk on them. Prayer may be elevating if combined

with works, and they who labor with head, hands or feet have faith and are generally quite sure of an immediate and favorable reply.

Those who take refuge behind theological barbed wire fences, quite often wish they could have more freedom of thought, but fear the change to the great ocean of scientific truth as they would a cold bath plunge.

Mr. Bryan was an honored personal friend of mine, yet this need not prevent the observation that the skull with which Nature endowed him visibly approached the Neanderthal type. Feelings and the use of gesticulations and words are more according to the nature of this type than investigation and reflection.

Those who would legislate against the teaching of evolution should also legislate against gravity, electricity and the unreasonable velocity of light, and also should introduce a clause to prevent the use of the telescope, the microscope and the spectroscope or any other instrument of precision which may in the future be invented, constructed or used for the discovery of truth.

LUTHER BURBANK, INFIDEL

By Edgar Waite

I

When Luther Burbank, disciple, prophet and high priest of nature, announced himself as an infidel he loosed a shot in the hierarchy of orthodox thinking that was destined, like another shot before it, to be heard around the world.

On the morning of Friday, January 22, 1926, before Burbank's avowal of disbelief was broadcast through the press, California's gentle patriarch went about his experimental labors with the serenity of one who knows that he has harbored no evil thoughts of his fellowman and that in seventy-seven years of life he has never consciously hurt a living being.

He was the revered, kindly old gentleman of an admiring world. No voice had ever been raised against him. How could any voice be raised against a man who had done only good, who had filled the world's gardens with more beautiful flowers than they had ever known before, who in times of hunger and war had helped replenish the world's granaries by his genius, and who had given mankind meaty vegetables and gorgeous fruits such as nature, working blindly, had never before visioned?

At noon of that day the *San Francisco Bulletin*, shielding its sensational "beat" against the buccaneering plagiarisms of rival papers, rent wide its pages to make space for my copyright interview in which the famous horticulturist described himself fearlessly as an infidel, expressed disbelief in immortality, and of course scornfully dismissed Henry Ford's recently pledged adherence to a fantastic theory of reincarnation.

And before night Burbank, wrested violently from his calm nature-lore in the thriving little city of Santa Rosa, became the center of the most exciting philosophical and theological discussion of our era. Letters and telegrams began pouring in, first from nearby cities, but,

as the days passed, from an ever-widening circle that finally took in Canada, England, Germany and a score of other countries. From scientists and laymen who with Tennyson believe that "there is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds," came messages of commendation. From the orthodox clergy, and from cranks of all conditions of mental servitude, there came an avalanche of expostulation, reproof, and sibilant recrimination for the man who had had the temerity to tell what he thought in the face of established doctrine.

Ministers in Luther Burbank's own town, whose churches he had attended at times and for whose congregations he had more than once spoken on scientific subjects, winced, looked first askance, then scandalized. With wry faces religious leaders pecked at his words, outraged orators enveloped him in the gases of withering, trenchant criticism, and fanatics lashed him with biblical platitudes. Like kernels of popcorn, livid defenders of the faith, scorched by the heat of what a great man sees as Truth, jumped high into the air, and with quavering voices went into convulsions. Sententious champions of the gospel squared off to engage Burbank in Quixotic jousting, and fanatics ran amuck with anonymous threats of every dire punishment known either to God or the evil eye. One writer, addressing his protest to the newspaper that had first interviewed Burbank on the subject, consigned the plant wizard to no less a tropical climate than hell itself, where it was promised he would meet Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge,

And for many days thereafter, the furore, drawing fuel into the vortex with tentacles that encircled the earth, continued unabated. Rather was it marked with increased intensity, for many things were happening after that first interview was published.

But through all the fury and the flailing of a fetid atmosphere Burbank himself remained unperturbed. The Women's Christian Temperance Union in Santa Rosa, of which he was an honorary life member, held a meeting of prayer (which only ten women attended!) for the misguided scientist—a meeting that became not so much a time of prayer as an indignation council—yet Burbank refused either to have his soul saved or to recant. They could pillory him for the leering stares of a morbid public. They could burn him, figuratively, at the stake. They could unroll eternal thunder to peal out threats of everlasting damnation, but Burbank remained inflexible on his original platform.

From the outset the storm that blew so suddenly to rattle the holy eucharist became a battle of the dictionary.

Burbank had said he was an infidel. Self-constituted apologists, as represented by the newspapers that had missed the story and by zealous ecclesiastics, insisted at once that Burbank had been misunderstood, that he had meant agnostic or something else less offensively noxious than infidel. Churchmen and newspapermen invaded Burbank's home grounds in hordes, all apparently bent on the determination to substitute a less inflammatory word.

But Burbank evidently had consulted the dictionary before employing the word "infidel" in the first place, or in any event he peeked into its confiding pages after the first storm clouds began to break.

He had found that an agnostic is one who professes ignorance as to the beginning of things and the power behind them. He had found that an atheist is one who denies the existence of God. And he had found, in *Webster's New International Dictionary* that an infidel is:

1. In respect to a given religion, one who is an unbeliever; a disbeliever; especially a non-Christian or one opposing the truth or authoritativeness of the Christian Church.
2. One who does not believe (in something understood or implied).

Thus the harried, lovable old man, met his well-wishers with unflinching eye, and was able to say: "I am an infidel. I know what an infidel is, and that's what I am."

I heard these words with keen relish, for doubtless it would have gone hard with me had Burbank squirmed out of an unpleasant situation by declaring what so many wanted him to declare—that he had been misquoted, that his sentiments had been garbled and distorted as the words and deeds of Christ himself.

II

I had been sent to Santa Rosa to quiz Burbank as to his theories on immortality and reincarnation. Burbank had that day been quoted

in a brief dispatch as disputing the theory of his old friend, Henry Ford, that we return to earth after death to live again in some other form—perhaps a maple tree or a fox terrier.

"All right," said the managing editor, "Burbank has told us what he doesn't believe. Now it's your job to have him tell us what he does believe."

Burbank answered the question first by an epigram, and he asked that the interview begin with the thought it contained.

"Most people's religion," he said, "is what they would like to believe, not what they do believe. And very few of them stop to examine its foundations."

Then, going on to tell why he does not believe in a resurrection: "The universe is not big enough to contain perpetually all the human souls and the other living beings that have been here for their short spans. A theory of personal resurrection or reincarnation of the individual is untenable when we but pause to consider the magnitude of the idea. On the contrary, I must believe that rather than the survival of all, we must look for survival only in the spirit of the good we have done in passing through. This is as feasible and credible as Henry Ford's own practice of discarding the old models of his automobile. When obsolete, an automobile is thrown in the scrap heap. Once here and gone, the human life has likewise served its purpose. If it has been a good life, it has been sufficient. There is no need for another."

The scientist, who thus took exception to theories of a man whom he had but recently described as "one of the living geniuses who can truly typify our age," then went on to his adopted principle, true in his plant world as in human life, that there is no repetition in nature.

"The theory of reincarnation," he said, "comes, like all other religious theories, from the best qualities in human nature, even if in this as in the others its adherents sometimes fail to carry out the tenets in their lives.

"Religion grows with the intelligence of man, but all religions of the past and probably all of the future will sooner or later become petrified forms instead of living helps to mankind. Until that time comes, however, if religion of any name or nature makes man more happy, comfortable, and able to live peaceably with his brothers, it is good.

"But as a scientist I cannot help feeling that all religions are on a tottering foundation. None is perfect or inspired. As for their prophets, there are as many today as ever before, only now science refuses to let them overstep the bounds of common sense.

"The idea that a good God would send people to a burning hell is utterly damnable to me. I don't want to have anything to do with such a God. But while I cannot conceive of such a God, I do recognize the existence of a great universal power—a power which we cannot even begin to comprehend and might as well not attempt to. It may be a conscious mind, or it may not. I don't know. As a scientist I should

like to know, but as a man I am not so vitally concerned.

"As for Christ—well, he has been most outrageously belied. His followers, like those of many scientists and literary men, have so garbled his words and conduct that many of them no longer apply to present life. Christ was a wonderful psychologist. He was an infidel of his day because he rebelled against the prevailing religions and government. I am a lover of Christ as a man, and his work and all things that help humanity, but nevertheless just as he was an infidel then, I am an infidel today."

There it is, the hated word buried deep in the philosophical folds of a few candid remarks to a reporter. But let us go on:

"I do not believe what has been served to me to believe. I am a doubter, a questioner, a skeptic.

"However, when it can be proved to me that there is immortality, that there is resurrection beyond the gates of death, then will I believe. Until then, no."

One might think that these words would be accepted as the reasoned thoughts of a sane man. But in this age of bigotry they were not accepted. Burbank would have been the last man concerned to object to a calm, rational refutation of his views.

Instead of any such well ordered rebuttal, those of narrow vision and intolerant hatred for free thinking sought to crucify him with stinging words.

III

So it becomes necessary for me (since I have talked with Burbank many times on many subjects) to tell more about him as a man and as a thinker in order that the hysterical clamor that rent the air may not be accepted for more than its face value.

Burbank studied life at its fountain head—in the marvelous little buds and shoots and leaves that burgeon forth each spring to fill us anew with the awe for nature. He was a naturalist, no less than Thoreau. Nature was his teacher and he recognized her as a symbolism of that mysterious power which he was willing to have called God but which suited him as well if it was called merely Force. He saw nature, with Goethe, as the living, visible garment of that same mysterious power—God or Force, and faith in nature won him the eminent place he occupied in the world.

Why, then, did he lack faith in the accepted doctrines of religion? Why did he see all religions on a tottering foundation? Because religions are based on a promise of immortality, and a threat of divine punishment for sin—two things to which this nature man could not reconcile himself.

For the hope of immortality, he believed, is the refuge of cowards, and he could appropriately quote the Bible itself in pointing out that the commonly accepted faith is merely the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen but for which puny man, striv-

ing selfishly to improve his position, to increase his goods, always reaches out a grasping hand. Voltaire pictured faith as "deferential credulity." Burbank saw that incredulity may rob us of our smug complacency, but in recompense gives us a sense of sincerity in our efforts to arrive at the truth. The philosophy of the infidel, he knew, may not be the philosophy best suited to the masses, held in subjection by a tempting promise of good things to come, but to the thinker who wishes to tear aside the veil of false promises this philosophy must, after all, be the only acceptable one.

All this having been true to Burbank, if I caught his thought correctly, the great scientist's tolerant, yet withal inflexible, attitude toward those who were disparaging and ex-coriating him is entirely understandable.

When the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Santa Rosa called its meeting to pray for Burbank, he only smiled, as much as to say that prayer at least was harmless, even if it couldn't do any good.

Burbank had been a contributor to and a member of the organization for many years because he believed in its efforts toward bringing about prohibition. But he was not in the least perturbed when the very woman who had proposed him as an honorary life member five years ago joined in the call to save his soul. This call concluded with the following paragraph:

"All mothers and women who believe that irreparable injuries have been done to the cause of religion by the utterances of Luther

Burbank, and who believe in the efficacy of prayer, are invited to join together for a season of prayer for Luther Burbank that his eyes may be opened and our youth may not be led astray from the religion of their fathers."

The meeting was not so well attended as was to be expected. Only ten women of Santa Rosa, where Burbank had developed practically all the marvels of the fruit, vegetable and grain worlds for which his name has become known throughout the nations of the globe, turned out to lift their eyes in solemn supplication that his soul might be redeemed, that he might be forgiven for his blasphemy.

But in some inexplicable manner their prayers seem to have been unanswered. For Burbank continued to smile urbanely—and he stuck to his guns.

On the other hand, Mrs. Burbank, the scientist's young wife, flashed defiance. In announcing that she and her celebrated husband had declined invitations to attend the meeting, she said of her fellow townsmen:

"It is simply an effort by the people of Main Street to get a little publicity. If these misguided, impertinent people would confine their activities to persons of their own caliber they would be much more logical and perhaps accomplish some good. It is all quite in line with the efforts frequently made to get rain by praying for it."

And then, further to complicate an already vexed situation, Burbank accepted an invitation to speak from the pulpit of the First Con-

gregational Church in San Francisco. He had been so invited some time previously by the Rev. James L. Gordon, a modernist type of minister who leans more to the sensational and to the attractions of immediate public interest than toward the old-fashioned, conservative line of church programs. Now, with the discussion of immortality, resurrection and infidelity at the boiling point throughout the country, but particularly in California because its centrally distributing element was located here, Burbank philosophically consented to address the fashionable San Francisco congregation on his beliefs in divinity and eternity.

The church, of course, was crowded to the vestibule. Hundreds stood outside hoping to get in long after the doors were closed, and then stood an hour or more longer to see the white-haired infidel come forth from the church, where he had explained simply why he could not accept many of the commonly accepted beliefs.

It was a trying situation, no doubt—both for Burbank and for Dr. Gordon—but a congregation that had assembled in the huge stone edifice, forewarned of what it would hear, did not march out in indignant protest at Burbank's sacrilege, but stayed to hear him out in respectful silence, then left, some of them perhaps with the feeling that they had enjoyed a most entertaining hour.

But even that did not close the incident, although Burbank expressed hope, not without fervor, that the matter might be allowed to drop and he be allowed to get back to his work.

Letters continued to stream in from all points of the compass—538 of them in a single day, with the temperature steadily mounting. In all this febrile rush of things, however, the scientist was not too busy to write a reassuring letter to his newspaper friend, who in the midst of the furore had sent him a solicitous note expressing hope that his story and its reaction would not forever deprive Burbank of a zest for living.

"To be sure," the scientist wrote, "I have had my hands full the last few days, as I am receiving some five hundred or more letters a day, but the publication of our interview made my life happy, not miserable."

And then, doubtless with a mischievous sparkle in his eyes, he returned with sardonic glee to the word around which the whole controversy has ranged, subjoining, "*Faithfully* yours, Luther Burbank."

IV

In the meantime, the orthodox clergy of California joined with that of other sections in soundly berating Burbank for being so courageous as to voice his views.

Said the Rev. Fred A. Keast of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Santa Rosa, where Burbank had attended services sporadically: "Mr. Burbank, in a time when the youth of the land are jazz crazed and breaking away in large numbers from religious teachings, has voiced foolish utterances." And he went on, according to press dispatches, to score Burbank as an uneducated man,

Whereat the latter replied: "Although I went to college as a youth, I never considered it necessary to steep oneself in academic learning in order to learn how to think. I welcome a fair and square, open and above-board fight on any subject, including this, but I despise a man who sneaks around under a cloak or cover of any society or clique to strike his blows."

Said the Rev. E. E. Ingram, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Santa Rosa: "If words can be made to mean anything that one wants them to mean, we are bordering on linguistic anarchy. I regard Mr. Burbank's statement as most unfortunate and not worthy either of Mr. Burbank's head or heart. Mr. Burbank does not seem to know the meaning of the words and terms he used."

But Burbank merely smiled, pointing his finger suggestively toward the dictionary, and replied: "I said I am an infidel in the true sense of that word. Look it up, if you don't believe it."

In addition to these critics, others presented themselves from near and far. One suggested kindly that "the gardener should stick to his cabbages," another that "the cobbler should stick to his last."

Archbishop Edward J. Hanna of San Francisco, who was mentioned in press dispatches from Rome as a likely candidate to be elevated to the rank of cardinal, entered into a lengthy dissertation to prove that there is a God—a premise, or conclusion, as you will, that Burbank never denied. He merely said that for all of him the power called God might just as well

be called Allah, Force, or by any other name deemed fitting.

On this point he elucidated further: "I believe in a supreme ruler of the universe, no matter what name one applies to it. The chief trouble with religion has been too much dependence upon names or words. People fail to discriminate. They do not think. Generally people who think for themselves, instead of thinking according to the rules laid down by others, are considered unfaithful to the established order. In that respect I, too, differ with the established order and established designations."

Nor did Burbank stand alone in his fearless tearing away of old veils.

Dr. Ray Lyman Wilbur, president of Stanford University, had this to say: "The great accomplishment of science has been to place much of superstition in the discard. Science deals with ascertainable facts. Religion goes farther than science in that it deals with personality and persons. The great difficulties that science has had with religion have come largely from the fact that there has always been a strongly dogmatic quality in organized religion. A race grows with accumulated experience, just as does a child, and with a racial growth there come new conceptions of religion. There is evolution in religion and religious thought that is as evident as the evolutionary processes in other phases of the world."

Of the western ministers; only one, Rabbi Jacob Nieto, spoke up in partial defense of Burbank's views. "While not going so far as to

say that religion today is on a tottering foundation," he told interviewers, "I do believe that it is in a state of transition and that Tom Paine's 'age of reason' is dawning upon the world. If Mr. Burbank meant that he is an agnostic rather than an infidel I can understand his position, for neither do I believe everything that is told me. It is true that the Bible has been edited and re-edited many times, in each case to suit the spirit of its particular age and occasion, but I would not say that Christ's words have been garbled. As to immortality, let us remember the verse in Ecclesiastes: 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.'"

V

The battle of the dictionary, and, for that matter, the eternal battle of the ages—almost as old as the battle of the sexes—continued to ebb and flow.

Burbank, rising as ever at six o'clock and putting in a hard day's work in his experimental gardens fifty miles from San Francisco, lent a not too attentive ear to the conflict, going on serenely about his labors, his conscience clear, his mind keenly alert, but willing to wait for Death itself to show whether there is anything beyond. Burbank knew that the reason of weak men staggers before the thought of immortality, and that through appetite for it "imagination folds her weary pinions."

As for himself, let the curtains draw aside

when they might. He knew he would continue to believe that Christ was but a man, and that when we quit this life we lie down to rise no more.

Nor had he any apologies to make for his heresy. If anyone asked him, there were always the words of Carlyle:

Pin thy faith to no man's sleeve.
Hast thou not two eyes of thy own?

LUTHER BURBANK SPEAKS OUT

By Joseph McCabe

There were two Pillars of Hercules in the United States whom I wished to see. Thomas A. Edison towers on the eastern coast, but I had to rush through New York and could not stay for my friend to present me. In San Francisco I had the—for so restless a wanderer—unusually long stay of six days, when the imperious voice of E. Haldeman-Julius, vibrating over the wires, roused me from my slumbers and bade me seek the shrine of Santa Rosa. I responded with alacrity. No, that is not poetry. I rose at 7 a. m. For me that is deadly prose.

And prosy was the journey of fifty miles to see the great master of practical science. The Golden Gate was of ancient lead. The hills were sullen. A gray-blue haze screened the fair maid California. She was just recovering, maid-like, from a prolonged fit of weeping, and seemed cold even to the amorous sun, though the stately palms and rich green oranges bore witness to the warm blood pulsing in the heavy

bosom, and the soft sibilants of the Spanish names suggested saints and sinners. San Rafael, San Anselmo, and so on. We have wiped out these superstitions, of course. Now we have St. Riley and St. Straton. Well, Anselmo was at least a conscientious scholar in his time, and Rafael, if tradition be worth aught, was a comely youth. But these modern saints and sages. . . .

We are in Santa Rosa and this is the house of the man who did as much as any to impress on the world the beneficent power of science. He added billions to the wealth of the world, but this is no marble palace softly gleaming through the palms and cypresses. A very plain house, and a very pretty maid looks at me cynically through the mosquito-net door. She is used to visitors, and does not trouble to unfasten the door.

"Is Mr. Burbank in?"

"Yes, he is in," she says, and she does not add in words, "And you are out." Even the dog is hostile, silently disdainful. "Another old fool trying to see the master," it insinuates. But my card throws down all defense and a moment later I am shaking (very gently) the rather limp hand of the man I would have gone far to see.

Pathetically he points to a pile of opened letters, ankle-deep, on the floor. "Today's crop," he says. A smaller pile lies on the desk and must be answered. We must hurry, though there is no mistaking his genuine pleasure to see me.

"Well, what about this recent misconduct of yours?" I ask, sternly.

Candidly he is puzzled, and I have to tell him that the world is shocked or elated, according to the length of its hair, at his recent pronouncement on the future life—I mean, on the absence of a future life. Henry Ford, his friend, had recently declared his belief, not only in incarnation, but in reincarnation. Henry always does things big, and, incidentally, it is always the people who know most about *machines*—Kelvin, Lodge, Faraday, Ford—who talk most about *spirit*. Psychologists and biologists, who ought to know, are very shy of spirits.

However, Burbank was asked what he thought about the matter, and he did not speak in parables. We no more survive, he said, to the representative of the San Francisco *Bulletin*, than does the automobile you fling on the scrap-heap. Those are his words. We survive only in "the good we have done in passing through." Souls? Why, said Burbank, "the universe is not big enough to contain perpetually all the human souls and the other living beings that have been here for their short span." Very comforting to some people, these religions, he said, but "as a scientist I cannot help feeling that all religions are on a tottering foundation." God? Well, there is "a great universal power," but whether it is "a conscious mind" or not, Luther Burbank did not know. What is worse, he did not care. "As a scientist I should like to know, but as a man I am

not so vitally concerned." No wonder California, the land of saints and angels, wept.

Not much to be added to, or explained, in that," Mr. Burbank said to me, smiling. He disliked talking. Looking rather frail, pale and artistic—he somehow reminded me at once of my good friend Eden Phillpotts, the most artistic of living writers after D'Annunzio—he seemed born to finger a brush or a pen, not a spade. Artist he was, of course: the great artist of modern science. He *worked* with its flower. He did not speculate about it.

"There is nothing at all new in this interview," he said. I had, of course, read his *Training of the Human Plant*, and had for that enshrined him in my *Dictionary of Modern Rationalists*, but, on the rare occasions when he does speak in public, he speaks out in a way that goes far to redeem the credit of American science. "Here," he said to me, "you have the sentiments I lately expressed *in the pulpit of a chapel* at Santa Rosa."

It was just the same outspoken denunciation of theology. "No avenging Jewish God, no Satanic devil, no fiery hell, is of any interest to me," he said. Jesus? He liked the literary figure, but "the clear light of science teaches us that we must be our own saviors." God? "The God within us is the only available God we know." We must come out from "behind theological barbed-wire fences," into "the great ocean of scientific truth." "Science, unlike theology, never leads to insanity." The word "ceremony," he pungently said, "is derived from "cerements" or "grave clothes." Very topical,

in a chapel. Religion is a matter of feeling, and "feelings are all right if one does not get drunk on them." "Obsolete misleading theologies," he said, "bear the same relation to the essence of true religion that scarlet fever, mumps, and measles do to education." But what will become of the children? If there was one thing Burbank was zealous about it was the training of children, and children are, he said, "the greatest sufferers from outgrown theologies."

No, there is not much to add to that. Luther II threw his ink-pot at the devil—the parson—with a vigor that surprises when one recalls the fleshy physique of the first Luther, and contrasts it with the gentleness and silver hair of the second. But he is as disgusted as I at the "timidity" of his brother scientists in America. I explain, almost apologetically, that I have entitled an article "The Cowardice of American Scientists."

"Quite right," he says. "And it is not only cowardice, but wrong tactics. What is the use of assuring Fundamentalists that science is compatible with religion. They retort at once, 'Certainly not with our religion.'"

Burbank uses the word religion, but it is never misleading. It is, he says, "justice, love, truth, peace and harmony, a serene unity with science and the laws of the universe." It is idealism, and there is not the slightest countenance of any sort of theology in Burbank's use of the word.

I remind him that Dr. David Starr Jordan is

popularly supposed to have hinted that his friend went too far.

"Not in the least," he says disdainfully. "Jordan is one of my best friends, and thinks as I do."

And, in fact, though the language is a little more diplomatic, Jordan's pronouncement is, substantially, Agnosticism. Mr. Burbank did not believe in knocking a man down when it is not good for him to stand up. He provided a chair. Dr. David Starr Jordan is inclined to provide a feather bed. There *are* physicians who think a wooden chair the most healthful seat. Anyhow, there is no Millikanism or Osbornism about either of these two fine American gentlemen.

"Bryan—a great friend of mine, by the way—had a Neanderthal type of head," Burbank says. "As to Riley, he has not even the oratorical skill of Bryan. The whole movement is based on the poor whites of the south."

I remind him of the ten million religious colored people of the United States.

"Yes, another big element in the movement," he assents. "And to think of this great country in danger of being dominated by people ignorant enough to take a few ancient Babylonian legends as the canons of modern culture. Our scientific men are paying for their failure to speak out earlier. There is no use now talking evolution to these people. Their ears are stuffed with Genesis."

I almost felt at times as though I were talking to Darwin, and I expected some deprecation of my vigor and lack of diplomacy, such as Dar-

win used gently to administer to Haeckel. Not a bit. I took courage and remarked that Fundamentalism must be fought "with both fists."

"Of course it must," he said, "and our scientific men must be criticized boldly. They will not feel comfortable when you and I are through with them."

He spoke with envy of the Rationalist Press of England and its honorable company of distinguished men of science and letters. I told him that I am to do a bigger work in America than I have ever done in England. "Mr. Haldeman-Julius," I began. . . .

"Doing splendid work," he said. "Can we have some of these Little Blue Books to help in the work?"

He lighted up with enthusiasm when I described the plan which Mr. Haldeman-Julius and I have hatched—fifty Little Blue Books covering the entire ground of religious controversy and inquiry, systematically and courteously, but firmly and inexorably.

"That will be magnificent help," he said. "And let us have some of the Big Blue Books too."

I explained that some of the latter are already in circulation and more of a Rationalist nature will come. The old man was visibly delighted. Almost alone in his scientific world he outspokenly disdained creeds and ceremonies. Undermining ancient dogmas is not enough. The people, who begin to see the power of science, must know what men of science, with their trained minds and their grasp of realities, think about man and the universe.

So out I went, to continue my mission in California, with the hearty "good-speed" of this wondrous man. Santa Rosa, nay California, is proud of him, and there must be some temptation to avoid friction. What, no danger in California? Why, here in a suburb of San Francisco I hear of an audience of five thousand Fundamentalists rocking with laughter at some of the elementary truths of science. Even the educated run after iridescent verbiage and shun facts. Hindu word-spinners dig gold here.

As I sped away my eye caught a board in a field by the road: "Jesus is the way, the truth and the life," it said. This after 1900 years experimental verification of his efficacy! And in the heart of California, where Luther Burbank showed that the only way and truth and life is science. All honor to him that he did not leave it to such obtuse minds to "draw their own conclusions," as so many do. "Science is the only savior," he said to people. He said it in church one memorable day.

"I very rarely speak in public, and, curiously, my two addresses are in churches," he said, eyeing me, I thought, apprehensively.

"I know no better place to say such things," I retorted, and I thought sadly of the very different things which American men of science had recently been saying in the churches of Kansas City during the convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

